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World Domination 2001 Qualifiers

by Jens Kreutzer
<rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>

This year's **Netrunner™** World Domination championship is finally gathering some momentum. Various Qualifier tournaments have been registered, with some of them already played. I have put together all of the information I could glean from the sporadically updated WD webpage (http://homepage.mac.com/kiloecho/VCG/wd01.html) and the Netrunner-l. This list is probably not exhaustive.

Time frame:
World Domination Qualifiers:
1 August - 7 October 2001
World Domination Round 1 (will perhaps not be necessary): 8 October - 25 November 2001
World Domination Finals:
1 December 2001 - 31 January 2002

World Domination Qualifier Events:
already played:

2 September – Sapporo, Japan (8 players)
1. Masayasu Takano
2. Yoshikage Kira

9 September – Atlanta, USA (9 players)
1. Graham Coleman
2. Ian Port

15 September – Tokyo, Japan (12 players)
1. Fumiyoshi Nagashima
2. Sadato Kato
3. Muneki Tada

16 September – Brussels, Belgium (13 players)
1. Yannick Mescam
2. Yves Savonet
3. Frederic Chorein

16 September – London, U. K. (6 players)
1. Philip Harvey (prequalified)
2. Mark Applin

16 September – Seattle, USA (6 players)
1. Byron Bailey (prequalified)
2. Byron "Neal" Massey

**22 September –
Karlsruhe, Germany** (9 players)
1. Dieter Geulen
2. Holger Janssen (prequalified)
3. Lukas Kautzsch (prequalified)
4. Michael Nock

State of the Revolution

by Zvi Mowshowitz
<zvimowshowitz@hotmail.com>

While I've been busy with **Magic™**, I gave WotC's representative an ultimatum (as friendly as possible) to either confirm that they were still signing the deal and give me a firm date or to confirm they were going back on the contract agreement. The deadline was in a week and a half, when I returned from the **Magic** Worlds. It has now been slightly over a week since my return, and I've also sent my most reliable contact in WotC back with the same message.

I've been unable to get a reply from him, either on the phone or by e-mail. I'll keep trying as long as I can, and I have one last card I'm going to try and play. But my current understanding is that given the small potential for payoff it wasn't worth the effort and legal risk that someone might pierce my corporate veil and sue WotC somehow. At any rate, if I'm going to face this kind of opposition or even stonewalling from them whenever I need anything, things get much more difficult.

In short, there is now a high probability, I would say over ninety percent, that WotC has decided to kill the deal by failing to complete the paperwork and kept me in the dark about the situation by pretending that the problem was simply that they couldn't free the few hours to complete the paperwork just yet. I have a long-standing and very profitable and productive relationship with WotC as a **Magic** professional, which is likely the reason I got as far as I did, but apparently they didn't feel the need to level with me.

So, on the assumption that when I finally get through I get shut down, I sincerely apologize for getting everyone's hopes up. I should have known WotC better. I apologize for wasting everyone's time. Now, this is still not final; I do think there is a chance I can save this, although I admit it is small. Here's what I plan to do from here. I'll keep trying to get a firm reply. If and when I do get shut down, I'll announce the fact and release the files I did manage to get from WotC concerning *Silent Impact™*.

Sadly, *Zvi Mowshowitz.*

THE DIOSCURI (PART FOUR)

Diversified Holdings Corp. – DIOSCURI—Corp

The trash cost of all your nodes (including those stored in HQ and R&D) is increased by the number of rezzed and/or revealed nodes you have in play.

Whenever you rez a node that contains the text "Put X from the bank on [card name] when you rez it.", put 2X bits on [card name] instead.

Starting Hand: 5
Starting Bits: 5

R&D Informer – DIOSCURI—Runner

If the Corp installs multiple cards from a single action, you may immediately install one card at no cost. The Corp may pay 2* when you do this, in which case you may either pay the normal installation cost plus all other appropriate costs, or return the card to your hand.

If the Corp draws multiple cards from a single action, you may draw one card. The Corp may pay 2* to prevent this.

"We hear they're opening a branch in Chicago."
"Chicago! You know what that means! Let's move!"

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#11: The Nasty Code Gate Deck

by Jens Kreutzer
<rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>
using material by Jim McCoy, with permission

"Once you get experienced with how this deck plays, you will find it a useful addition to your collection."
—Jim McCoy

Choosing a certain kind of ice as a "theme" has always been a fun way for the Corp player to go about building a deck. After all, there are Skälderviken SA Beta Test Site and Black Ice Quality Assurance for Black Ice; we have Data Masons and Superior Net Barriers for walls, while Encoder, Inc. and Encryption Breakthrough support code gates. However, after years of trying, it has become apparent that only one of the three approaches really has any promise in the unforgiving realm of tournament play—the code gate deck. And, using Encoder, Inc. as the essential part of his strategy, famous Runner Jim "McCode Gate" McCoy has proven that it can get downright nasty.

The trick is that unlike Skälderviken and Data Masons, Encoder, Inc. doesn't just give a strength bonus or reduces rez cost—most importantly, it adds an "End the run" subroutine to all code gates. This wouldn't be such a big deal, since nearly all code gates have an "End the Run" subroutine already, and against breakers like Skeleton Passkeys or Codecracker, it wouldn't make any difference anyway. However, two specific code gates benefit tremendously from Encoder, Inc., namely Misleading Access Menus and Ball and Chain. The former, a "payback" ice at strength 1, suddenly becomes a "real" piece of ice that is not only better than Sleeper, but also gives the Corp player 3 bits. Ball and Chain suddenly becomes stronger than Mazer, at a dead-cheap rez cost of just 1 bit. With two Encoders in play, it rezzes for free.

It is this synergy that makes Jim's code gate deck so very nasty: Because a pretty strong ice defence is put up almost for free, there is enough money left for advancing agendas and further mischief like Crystal Palace Station Grid, which makes sure that Runners using Skeleton Passkeys won't go scot-free. Crucially, there is no superweapon against code gates along the lines of Big Frackin' Gun or Pile Driver, so that it just gets more and more expensive for the Runner. Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker and Rent-I-Con also pay dearly for multi-subroutine Ball and Chains.

The following is the deck list sent by Jim McCoy to the Netrunner-l on January 21, 1997.

4	**Encryption Breakthrough**
3	**Tycho Extension**
1	**AI Chief Financial Officer**
4	**Encoder, Inc.**
1	**Virus Test Site**
1	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
3	**Antiquated Interface Routines**
2	**Crystal Palace Station Grid**
1	**Chester Mix**
8	**Misleading Access Menus**
10	**Ball and Chain**
3	**Mazer**
2	**Haunting Inquisition**
1	**Rock Is Strong**
1	**Minotaur**
1	**Code Corpse**
3	**Accounts Receivable**
3	**Off-site Backups**
1	**New Blood**

Jim already did a great job himself explaining the strategy behind his deck, and the following remarks are to a great extent a paraphrase of what he posted to the Netrunner-l.

The core of the Nasty Code Gate deck are its four Encoder, Inc. Next to the main subfort that is heavily iced and later used to score agendas, the Corp will therefore also create one or two other subforts to hold Encoders. While the main subfort ideally has Minotaur and Haunting Inquisition as its innermost ice, the second subfort for the first Encoder should be reasonably but not too heavily protected. If the opportunity for creating a third subfort presents itself later in the game, ice that consists mainly of Misleading Access Menus will be sufficient for protecting it. HQ and R&D are iced as needed; most of the time, a light protection will be enough, but when facing a dedicated HQ- or R&D-attack stack, they can be fortified similarly to the main subfort.

Hopefully, the first Encoder, Inc. turns up quickly. As soon as it is drawn, it should be installed in the second subfort. Now, Ball and Chain and Misleading Access Menus mutate to quite expensive "must-break" ice. Moreover, when raising the strength of the icebreaker to be able to break the "End the run" subroutine anyway, it is usually cheaper for the Runner to break the "Pay two bits ..." subroutine of Ball and Chain as well than to suffer its effect. A second Encoder makes everything even more expensive for the Runner. Haunting Inquisition as an occasional surprise might allow the Corp to score an agenda "in the open" while the Runner sweats of his no-run actions.

Other ice tech includes Minotaur, a natural choice for a code gate deck, alongside Code Corpse and Rock Is Strong, so that each type of ice is present, which forces the Runner to install a full breaker suite. New Blood optimizes the ice configuration, putting early Ball and Chains into outermost positions and switching Minotaur and the other heavies to innermost positions. All of the upgrades likewise function as support for the ice. Chester Mix helps with building the main subfort (often six ice deep); Antiquated Interface Routines are neat because they catapult Mazer's and Ball and Chain's strength over the second Skeleton Passkeys threshold (it pays 6 instead of 3 bits against strength 6); Crystal Palace Station Grid combines well with the ever-increasing subroutines and is a potent weapon against icebreakers that pay 0 bits to break a subroutine. There are a lot of possibilities within the Nasty Code Gate deck to make the Runner's life expensive, and Jim accurately described this synergy as "death by a thousand paper cuts".

Another notable characteristic of this deck is its total lack of fast-advancement cards, in spite of its agendas being of a rather high difficulty (4 or 5). This means that it relies completely on its strong ice defences to keep the agendas safe for at least one Runner turn while they are being advanced "by hand". The one Virus Test Site, however, could be used as a further deterrent not to run cards with advancement counters. Further, the deck doesn't include a lot of bitgainer nodes or operations: just one BBS Whispering

Campaign and three Accounts Receivable. The eight Misleading Access Menus are the main source of bits, later helped along by huge influxes from Encryption Breakthrough. There lies a danger in the fact that Misleading bits won't flow if the Runner doesn't run. But then, Nasty Code Gate is a very slow deck anyway (and on purpose), so that it doesn't stand much of a chance against no-run Runner stacks like Masochism Rules in the first place.

Versatile Off-site Backups is a card to consider for every Corp deck; in this case, the three copies are indispensable for recycling trashed Encoders. However, they might also fetch back trashed upgrades, or even agendas that were hidden away in the Archives. As far as Jim's agenda choice is concerned, Encryption Breakthrough of course fits right in with the deck theme, boosting Code Gate strength (e. g., against Skeleton Passkeys) and giving a sizable bit influx of perhaps ten or twelve bits at a time. AI Chief Financial Officer (AI CFO) is an insurance against getting decked, and also is a potent draw engine for getting used operations or trashed nodes/upgrades back into HQ. Since the Nasty Code Gate deck is intentionally slow, getting decked is a possibility that must be addressed. However, just one AI CFO is not much, as Jim has remarked himself: "I learned the hard way in a tournament that a single AI CFO is not enough; if the runner gets lucky and manages to score the AI CFO, then you need to hope that your agendas are not clustered at the bottom of the deck, or else you will not have enough time to advance and score them."

Another consideration that must be made with today's tournament environment in mind is agenda choice number three, the three Tycho Extensions, which—like in so many card-intensive theme decks—conveniently provide the remainder of the needed agenda points without taking up a lot of deck space. Tycho Extension, however, is banned in the Revised Constructed format, and therefore, an alternative would have to be found if Nasty Code Gate were to be used in such a tournament. Jim has suggested Political Overthrow; this could even make additional AI CFOs feasible and accordingly has promise. Also possible is substituting four Corp Wars for the Tychos and one Accounts Receivable; cards that might be removed from the deck in order to make room for agendas would have to be bitgainers, or maybe the sentry ice (most Runners will install a sentry breaker anyway, just in case). If Corp War seems too dangerous (beware Terrorist Reprisal!) or inconvenient, other options include Security Net Optimization since it fits the theme, alongside the usual suspects Employee Empowerment and Main-Office Relocation. Jim also mentioned Genetics-Visionary Acquisition, but with its single agenda point, it probably takes up too much deck space.

Let's take a closer look at how this deck plays (and just how tough code gates can get). Again, Jim has already done an excellent job explaining all of this, and the following remains close to his remarks. Nasty Code Gate sets up slowly, but hopes to keep ahead of the Runner in the bit race, making it more and more expensive to breach the most important data forts. In time, the cost will become overwhelming (barring Runner interference): Jim gives the example of a mid-game subfort with Minotaur (innermost), four Ball and Chain, and a Misleading Access Menus (outermost), augmented by Crystal Palace Station Grid, Antiquated Interface Routines, one Encoder, Inc. and one scored Encryption Breakthrough. This makes Ball and Chain strength 7, with two subroutines. Minotaur has strength 5 and also five subroutines. Misleading Access Menus has strength 3 and two subroutines.

In this combination, Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker pays 65 bits to get through, which is much more than even three Loan from Chiba will give the Runner. With a Skeleton Passkeys/Big Frackin' Gun combination, it still costs 57 bits. Even *Classic*'s new powerhouse Rent-I-Con guzzles up 53 bits to breach this fort. Counting all upgrades, rezzing this whole datafort with just one Encoder in play costs only 14 bits (the three bits gained for rezzing Misleading are already deducted). Installation costs can be reduced to a mere 6 bits with Chester Mix, for a total of 20 bits. And a second Encoder reduces costs further and bumps up the bit costs for the Runner even more.

The Nasty Code Gate deck is very defensive in its approach, as Jim has also pointed out. It neither aggressively pushes its agendas through, nor does it try to actively damage or flatline the Runner (apart from Virus Test Site). Not quite as predictable as a Rent-to-Own deck, it is a solid possibility for tournament play, being able to adapt to Runner strategies to a certain degree. To drain Runner bits, the Corp will sometimes have to "sacrifice" an agenda, installing a second one right after the first has been stolen, when the Runner is (presumably) broke and cannot get through to it. Usually, the game will be decided by the Runner's choice of code gate (or generic) breaker, and woe to the Runner who somehow loses this all-important program. Apart from no-run Bad Publicity stacks, it is perhaps the "big finale"-type stacks like Big Dig or The Short Stack that can become the most dangerous for Nasty Code Gate. Ice destruction that gets going fast is also a threat. On the other hand, R&D control with Technician Lover, or TagMe stacks of various kinds might see themselves in serious trouble. HYHADIARS, using Bartmoss and Loan from Chiba, also will probably have to struggle hard to implement its plans. Against Clown, Crystal Palace gives the Corp a fighting chance.

Some comments on individual Runner cards: Death from Above is an annoyance, while cards like Remote Detonator always hurt severely if the Corp builds a huge datafort—in this case, at least, it will likely cost the Runner more than the Corp, since the ice is so cheap to rez. Against Security Code WORM Chip and Core Command: Jettison Ice, icing HQ and Archives becomes top priority.

Thinking about possible variations of Nasty Code Gate, the following comes to mind: Virus Test Site and Code Corpse do not really fit the theme of the deck; rather than damage, trashing the Runner's code gate breaker is probably more devastating. Putting in Experimental AI (also Jim's suggestion) and Colonel Failure or Data Naga instead therefore seems like a good idea (Jim revealed that he picked Code Corpse when metagaming against a Joan-of-Arc-heavy environment). Other cards a Corp player might consider are Rio de Janeiro City Grid, Sterdroid or Rasmin Bridger for extra nastiness, or Syd Meyer Superstores for bits in a pinch (the latter appeared in an earlier version of Jim's deck). To thwart Demolition Run or protect agendas, using Data Fort Remapping as an agenda choice also has promise—getting remapped and then having to run that huge fort *again* will surely be tough on the Runner. Theorem Proof would fit in with the trashing approach. *Classic*'s new code gate Puzzle (and perhaps Vortex) might also be worth a try.

Once more in Jim's words: "A code gate deck is the antithesis of a speed advancement deck, it builds slowly and just keeps getting stronger as the game wears on." Well, he has given us a classic in his Nasty Code Gate deck, and, rarest of all things, a strong deck that is also fun.

Emails to the Editor: Faked Hit Revisited

by Jens Kreutzer
<rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>

Byron "Neal" Massey (author of the late "Neal's Last Words" column) was kind enough to take the time and effort to make some comments on the "Masochism Rules" featured deck article that appeared in the last TRQ issue. Since he included his own advanced version of a Faked Hit stack, this "email to the editor" by him is of particular interest. When I replied to some of his remarks to explain my own point of view (also by email), a lively discussion ensued. I've put most of it together in the form of a dialogue:

Neal: Hey Jens, I'm starting to wonder what the qualifications are for a featured deck in the TRQ. It's kind of sad to read about Stephen Holodinsky's stack that wins in ten(!) turns without interaction. That is extremely slow, not even vaguely competitive at the time. Anyway, I am not asking for a pat on the back or anything, but reading about the stack in the last issue just left me shaking my head. I don't know what happened in Stephen's tournament, but there are plenty of stacks that changed the face of **Netrunner**. This was not one of them.

Ed.: *The question on how to decide which "Famous Decks" to cover is a good question indeed. Here's what I've been thinking: Many of the famous (or archetypical) decks in Netrunner are quite dated already. I'm trying to deal with the oldest strategies first, so that they don't become even more dated before they get their coverage. Further, I'm trying to include some variation (we haven't had a pure Bad Publicity stack yet). You will also have noticed that I alternate between Corp and Runner, for obvious reasons.*

Neal: I guess it depends on what the goal of your coverage is. I always laugh when kids come in my store and buy the **Magic™** cards to build a deck from *Scrye* magazine. Those decks might be "fun", but they aren't very competitive. I think it's great to highlight combos and ideas that are elegant or have a surprising synergy, but I don't want a deck listing for something that is much too slow or unlikely. That's just me. It follows that an article on a stack that was bad three years ago, and is bad now, doesn't do much for the reader or the writer.

Ed.: *Variation is the reason, for example, that "Greyhound Demolition Derby" hasn't been covered yet (because we've already had a Tag 'n' Bag deck). Faked Hit was included because I felt I had to do something on no-run Bad Publicity Runner stacks (before they become obsolete), but since the Faked Hit approach is older than Mantis/Poisoned, I did it first. You will realize that competitiveness in Constructed is not the only criterium for selection ("The World Would Swing..." is an example for a very famous, but not too strong deck). And I chose Stephen's deck because it was the best Faked Hit deck that I knew.*

Neal: I think "The World Would Swing..." is an important deck because it shows how to provide maximum defense against a run with a minimum of resources. And it utilizes a card that was meant as a joke by the game designers. Faked Hit ("Masochism Rules") doesn't have either of those features.

Ed.: *Anyway, though Faked Hit is not among the more memorable strategies, it* is *a very clearly defined deck archetype, namely no-run Bad Publicity, and it is, like I said, older than Mantis/Poisoned. It is also on the endangered species list (and deservedly so, of course). I probably should have made it clearer that the deck isn't very strong in today's environment—but since I've been saying that people shouldn't play it at all, it somehow slipped my mind.*

Neal: Perhaps I am just feeling grumpy because I have learned that Jennifer is being fired, and that Zvi is being stonewalled on the purchase of **Netrunner** (no surprise, as I mentioned in my earlier TRQ interview).

Ed.: *There's some good news at least: Though she won't continue her State of the Corp column, Jennifer hasn't been fired after all; she just had to change her position. She is the editor of WotC's miniatures section now (which, unfortunately, hasn't got much to do with CCGs or Netrunner anymore).*

Neal: Another thing about the article: The strong endorsement of Top Runner's Conference (TRC) over Loan from Chiba seems wrong to me. When I chatted with Rob of *Rob's Netrunner Node* in the good ol' days, we used to shake our heads and laugh at how "the kids" (our phrase for them) loved TRC, but that it was useless in Constructed. If the Corp can't force the Runner to run with City Surveillance or Blood Cat, it deserves to lose. The idea that a Runner can "simply pay for City Surveillance" with a TRC bit engine seems impossible to me. The other issue is the speed of installing TRC. It's slow. There are no cards that let you install more than one TRC per action. The way we used to talk about Loan from Chiba was that it was the equivalent of *five* turns with a single TRC, all in one action. There is no reasonable comparison between the power of the two cards.

Ed.: *I stand corrected. All I can say is that I'd rather have ten installed TRCs than ten installed Loans around the end of a long game, but probably, the stage in which TRC gets better than Loan (when you have installed about 6, I should guess?) is reached much too late in your average fast-paced tourney game. However—in this particular Faked Hit stack, do you really think Loan would be better than TRC, or are you saying this more in general?*

Neal: Both, there is no comparison. As you pile on additional Loans or TRCs, it just gets worse. After you install four Loans, you have 48 bits to use, losing four each of the next turns. After installing four TRCs, you have 8 bits at the start of each turn. If you move ahead, it takes four turns before the bit amount is equal, that is half a **Netrunner** game.

Ed.: *In my opinion, if you're collecting bits for a big finale (like Big Dig), Loan isn't the way to do it. Of course, this "big finale" kind of approach is slow by nature.*

Neal: Each TRC takes four turns to equal a Loan, that stretches your waiting time for the big finale by *four turns*. How can that be better? I think the average Constructed game lasts about nine turns. In the first few turns with a TRC deck, you have no money, so everything goes slower. It takes four actions to install four TRC (plus the problem of getting them) and *one* action to play a Loan, which you can spend immediately. I'm tired of talking about this; each person is welcome to his own opinion. Let me just say that Rob used to sell TRCs for 8-10 US dollars and laugh all the way to the bank.

Here's *my* best attempt at winning using only Faked Hit:

10	**Faked Hit**
14	**Preying Mantis**
10	**Loan from Chiba**
8	**N.E.T.O.**
3	**Access Through Alpha**

Here is how it should go:
1. Play enough Loans to keep using N.E.T.O.

2. Install Access through Alpha as soon as you see it with N.E.T.O.

3. Install the Preying Mantes as fast as you can; you need ten on the table.

4. If you need to discard at the end of your turn, make sure and discard extra copies of N.E.T.O., Access Through Alpha, and Loan from Chiba.

5. Don't take any Faked Hits with N.E.T.O. until you have ten Preying Mantis installed and are ready to win.

6. The turn before you are ready to win, you need to play four Loans. It takes 35 bits to play seven Faked Hits, plus you need to draw them with N.E.T.O., which will take another 21 bits or so.

7. On the winning turn, you use all the Preying Mantis actions for a total of 14 actions. You simply N.E.T.O. for three cards, play a Faked Hit, and repeat. Six more times.

8. You only need to take one card the very last time you use N.E.T.O. It is the last Faked Hit. You win as soon as you play it. That saves a couple of bits, and you become a martyr in Netspace.

9. N.E.T.O. is used because it is immune to City Surveillance and it allows you to get only the cards you want, although at greater expense.

Brief testing shows that this simple plan wins on turn eight. If you introduce Sneak Preview and Emergency Self Construct, it approaches the speed of Poisoned Water Supply/Preying Mantis.

Ed.: *Thanks very much for this gem of state-of-the-art deck tech. It really gets the Faked Hit strategy into gear, and I especially like the use of N.E.T.O. I've playtested the deck, and there are some comments I'd like to make. First of all, by cramming all seven Faked Hits reliably (!) into one turn, and by using N.E.T.O. to draw only those three cards you need in hand for playing a Hit, you can entirely dispense with MRAM Chips, which is an approach that is totally different from that of the other decks. I've found that your deck indeed usually finishes by turn eight (only sometimes it took me nine turns), which is fast in comparison. However, I've found that the deck gets into its own way at times, because it's very vulnerable to things going wrong because of the luck of the draw. Maybe it's just me, but if just one thing goes wrong, I either lose a lot of time, or it becomes impossible to stage the final winning turn, or I flatline myself—or all of the above. Things to look out for:*

1. You must *play four Loans in the penultimate turn. This means that you have to have four Loans in hand at the end of the turn before the penultimate. But if you start the game with two Faked Hits (or more) in hand, you won't manage this without discarding at least one Hit and giving yourself away.*

2. If you draw too many Faked Hits with N.E.T.O. at a time during the final turn, you might find yourself losing some to brain damage. Since there are three redundant Faked Hits in the deck, this is not that bad. But what do you do if you happen to draw no *Faked Hit with N.E.T.O. in this situation?*

3. Searching for Loans and/or Mantes can be a pain if you are unlucky and just find Access Through Alpha, Faked Hit and N.E.T.O. repeatedly. Especially, if after the sixth turn, you need just one more action to get the fourth Loan into your hand, you lose the entire next turn because of it—since the four Loans must all be played during a single turn, you can't start off playing them in the remaining three actions.

4. The most difficult issue for me was getting enough bits into my pool for the final turn. You need either 54 or 53 bits during this turn, but the four Loans you played in the turn before yield only 48 — 4 — [number of Loans already installed] = 44 bits at most. This means in effect that there must have been around 20 bits in your pool at the end of the turn before the penultimate. I find this prospect extremely difficult and would recommend installing 11 Preying Mantis, so that you have time for playing a fifth Loan at some point during the last turn when you happen to draw one with N.E.T.O.

Summing up: It's a very cool stack, but with an inconsistent performance. You have to be a really good player (better than me for sure) to realize its full potential, I guess. Maybe substituting Top Runners' Conference for the Loans would help? :-)

Neal: It would ensure that you didn't win till turn 14, but I don't think that would help :-) You'd still need the Access through Alpha because you are vulnerable to Underworld Mole. You'd stop losing bits at the end of each turn, but that really isn't the problem. The problem is having (as you point out) about 70 bits ready to make the win. That takes an impossibly long time with TRC.

Your criticisms of the deck design are very valid. I messed around with it some more after I sent it to you and found some of the problems you point out. Incidentally, I am thinking that we aren't really doing the concept justice without the Emergency Self-Construct (ESC) included. That's the broken card that makes Mantis/ESC work so well. But let's try to get by without it. Okay, maybe something like this: I have lessened the number of Mantes by splitting up the turn used to play the Faked Hits into two.

The Seventh Time was a Mistake

12	**Faked Hit**
11	**Loan from Chiba**
9	**Preying Mantis**
9	**N.E.T.O.**
3	**Mantis, Fixer-at-Large**
1	**Militech MRAM Chip**

Now you need five Preying Mantis installed so you can play five Faked Hits on the last turn. You only need to play two Faked Hits on the next-to-last turn. Mantis, Fixer-at-Large is for getting the Militech MRAM Chip (the only card in the stack you can't get with N.E.T.O.).

Ed.: *One minor point: Did you leave out Access through Alpha on purpose? And another: If you play only two Faked Hits in the penultimate turn, do you need the MRAM Chip at all? You get 4 brain damage, which you can endure without cyberware. Let's see: 4 actions + 5 Preying Mantis actions = 9 actions in the last turn. This means that you have to have three cards, one of them a Faked Hit, in hand at the end of the penultimate turn. Okay, I guess that means you need the chip after all. But wouldn't it be easier to install one more Mantis than to worry about what cards remain in your hand after four random discards, and to exchange Militech MRAM Chip and the Fixers for four Access through Alpha, like this?*

12	**Faked Hit**
11	**Loan from Chiba**
9	**Preying Mantis**
9	**N.E.T.O.**
4	**Access through Alpha**

Neal: Yes, we should of course include Access through Alpha somehow. However, if you look at it closely, installing six Preying Mantes takes a turn and a half, that seems like a lot if I'm only going to use them once. As it goes, you aren't really getting much benefit out of all those Mantes unil the last turn. That's a lot of stored actions. Maybe we should do the maths: Each Preying Mantis installed takes two actions, one to get it with N.E.T.O and one to install it.

Ed.: *... not taking into account drawing multiple Mantes with one N.E.T.O. action, but this probably wouldn't make too much of a difference in the calculation.*

Neal: So we need to use the Preying Mantes three times to justify their inclusion, otherwise we're adding actions to the total, or just coming up even. It's also clear that once we're using them more often then twice each, the more Preying Mantes we have, the better. All these numbers suggest a kinder, gentler approach that dispenses with Preying Mantis altogether, since it's so difficult to make them pay off. This probably means that we'll have to use more Militech MRAM Chips.

Ed.: *This is bringing us back into the direction of Stephen's deck, but with the Loan from Chiba/N.E.T.O. approach, it is surely worthwhile to try and go for a redo. In the last turn, you'd play two Faked Hits without worrying about brain damage, which means that we only have to take into account the ten brain damage from the other five Hits. Surprisingly, as few as two Militech MRAM Chips will do the trick, granting a hand size of 11 (while 10 would do). The problem will be getting them into your hand, which would have to be done by Mantis, Fixer-at-Large. How about this (taking a gamble versus Blood Cat):*

Neato-chism from Chiba

12	**Faked Hit**
11	**Top Runners' Conference**
9	**N.E.T.O.**
7	**Mantis, Fixer-at-Large**
4	**Back Door to Netwatch**
1	**Militech MRAM Chip**
1	**MRAM Chip**

Tests show that this outfit can win in eight turns, without much uncertainty due to randomness. Comments?

Interview with Holger Janssen, TRC Rules Sensei

by Jens Kreutzer
<rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>
(translated from the German by Jens Kreutzer)

Holger, for quite some time, you have been the TRC "Rules Sensei", which is the person appointed by the TRC to adjudicate Netrunner rules questions and decide on official rulings for shady areas of card interaction. Many players know you as a reassuring presence in the background of the Netrunner-l newsgroup, always ready to shed light on the various rules problems people stumble across during play. Could you perhaps tell us a bit about yourself, so that people can get to know you a little better?

I was born in Bonn, the former capital of West Germany, in 1971, but now I live in Überlingen (near Konstanz, in the south of Germany close to the Swiss border). I'm 30 years of age, and I'm doing R&D in aviation technology as a Dipl.-Ing. (academically qualified engineer) for a living. This includes launching the odd test projectile over the North Sea at supersonic speed ... :-)

Since when have you been playing Netrunner, and what did you find so attractive about it?

In short, from the very beginning—or rather, even earlier. In 1996, I was a student in Aachen, and a friend introduced me to **Netrunner** even before it was generally available. He had received some cards for playtesting because he had done some **Magic** translation for WotC. At first, **Netrunner** was quite popular even with the **Magic** players.
Regarding your second question: I have always been interested in card games, and when faced with the decision whether to pick up **Magic:The Gathering™** or **Netrunner** as my CCG of choice back then, **Netrunner** won because of its science-fiction background and the other players' not being too far ahead in terms of their play experience. Moreover, **Netrunner** could be played much better even with just a few cards, which, by the way, is one reason for the popularity Sealed-deck play is enjoying now. And it is Sealed that has always been my favorite tournament format. Another nice aspect of **Netrunner** are the two different sides of the game. Both need to be mastered, and they feel quite different from each other. Most players seem to understand or like the Corp better, but I prefer the challenge of the Runner.

Have you got any other experience with playing CCGs or roleplaying games? Have you got any other hobbies as well?

Like I mentioned above, I've also played some **Magic**, but only Sealed deck. I also went to some tournaments. Apart from that, I like playing boardgames, especially strategic ones. Add to that the various sports I do: basketball, skiing, rowing. As for roleplaying games, I played those a lot back in my school days. It was mostly *Midgard* (an RPG published in Germany) and *Traveller*.

How did it came to pass that you became Rules Sensei?

Well, somehow it just happened. When the TRC was looking for a new Rules Sensei, the Rabbi (Douglas) contacted me and asked if I would do the job. I answered that if the players thought I could manage it, I would try. Eventually, I got appointed. I had been answering most of the rules questions in Germany

before then, and I probably got a reputation by responding to rules questions on the Netrunner-l. The downside of the position is that there can be a lot of work at certain times, and that I cannot always expect the silent agreement of all players when I make a decision.

When deliberating on a rules issue, what are the principles that influence your decision? Is there a general "philosophy" that you try to adhere to when deciding?

At the moment I try to stay consistent with all the rulings made before. This is not always possible, as you might have noticed. And I try not having to correct myself too often. I think I will do a rules update sometime, but there is no timeframe yet. Apart from that, a ruling should also fit in with the "received" way a game of **Netrunner** should flow. If somebody comes up with really weird combinations or effects, then these should probably not work. You have to look at all cards as a whole and try to keep your principles as straightforward as possible.

Is there a place where people can get all of the current rulings?

You caught me—that is something of a weak spot. There hasn't really changed that much about the rulings since I became Rules Sensei, and therefore, the files on the usual webpages should still be valid. They can also be found on my own website `http://home.vr-web.de/holger.janssen/RulingsHome.html`, but I haven't been updating it for quite some time.
If players have a specific rules question that hasn't been covered yet in the current rulings, they are always welcome to either email me directly at
`Holger.Janssen@vr-web.de`
or to post the question to the Netrunner-l newsgroup, which I usually read on a regular basis.

In your opinion, what is the most "broken" (i. e., abusive) card in Netrunner on the Corp side?

The biggest problem is probably the definition of the expression "broken". Opinions really tend differ on this quite strongly. In this respect, Tycho Extension does not necessarily have to be considered "broken", but it is a card that defines the area of Constructed play to a great extent, and so it deservedly is now part of the Restricted list.

And on the Runner side?

Here, the choice is rather difficult. There are a lot of cards that can really annoy the Corp, but that doesn't mean that they are broken at all. You probably have to ask which card has the greatest influence on the way the Corp is playing. To answer this, you'd probably have to name the combination of Precision Bribery/Time to Collect.

Do you have a favorite memory about a particularly interesting or exciting game of Netrunner?

I've surely had many interesting games, but I can't recall a special event right now. The most exciting games are probably those in which both players have a chance of winning (meaning their planned deck strategy works out), and one of them then narrowly manages to decide the game in his or her favor.

Apart from being our Rules Sensei, you are perhaps the most-feared Sealed-deck Netrunner player in Germany. You are especially famous for your analytical and calm (some would say cool and aloof) way of playing, no matter what the current situation is like, which has earned you the nickname, or rather, nom de guerre *of "The AI". A joke question to go with it: How many Pacifica Regional AI and Krumz do you own?*

Fortunately not so many Krumz, but thanks to the promo cards, I have quite a few Pacificas. :-)

Let me ask you about Sealed-deck construction. What are the things that go through your mind when you're picking the cards to play with?

I think that there are some good articles on deck construction in Sealed on the 'Net. The most important basics are well explained there. Apart from those, people tend to have personal preferences and dislikes of certain cards, which everybody develops over time. I reckon that with good players, the decks they'd build will only differ by not more than 5-8 cards.

Do you have a favorite deck strategy for Constructed?

Well, especially as Runner, I tend towards a playing style that is more active/offensive than passive.

Favorite card?

Right now, Priority Wreck and Unlisted Research Lab are my "in" cards. :-)

Thank you very much for your time, and also for your continued efforts as Rules Sensei.

Did You Know?
Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection
#11: Liche

by Jens Kreutzer
`<rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>`
with support by Nils Kreutzer

Liche is arguably the scariest piece of ice in the whole of **Netrunner**. Though with the advent of *Proteus*™, it was relegated to second place in terms of sheer rez cost by Colonel Failure, the Colonel attacks only programs—while Liche still represents the most brutal attack on the Runner's frontal lobe there is. But admittedly, this toughest variety of Black Ice has lost somewhat of its glamour since the days when 14 bits in the Corp player's pool was considered something of a "magic number". Today's streamlined tournament play doesn't leave much room for Black Ice-heavy strategies, rather investing such large sums of bits in fast advancement. Moreover, Liche is at its best when sprung as a surprise, but the single widespread strategy that uses big ice these days, Rent-to-Own, rezzes its ice beforehand, negating any surprise. And so, it is usually Colonel Failure with its five must-break subroutines that ends up getting used in Rent-to-Own, with declassed Liche often serving as a substitute if not enough Colonels are available. After all, brain damage isn't so bad when you see it coming, while

getting a program trashed usually means "End the run" if it wasn't the innermost piece of ice.

Where Liche hails from is rather obvious: There is a program of the selfsame name in R. Talsorian's **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.™**, the role-playing game that lent its background to **Netrunner**. In the basic rulebook of **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** (page 139), it says: "An advanced form of Zombie, Liche also rips away the forebrain [...], but selectively. Most memory is eradicated, leaving enough to implant an easily controlled (by the Referee) pseudo personality into the empty brain. Icon: A metallic skeleton dressed in black robes and wearing a blackend crown. It grabs the Netrunner in its freezing grasp and drags him back under the floor."

This description is accurately reflected in the straightforward but very fitting artwork by Mark Poole. However, there's more trivia to it, as Rick Cripe has revealed: "Mark Poole did the illustration for both Liche and the original Counterspell in **Magic:The Gathering™**. If you hold them next to each other, you clearly see that it's the same guy from Counterspell in the Liche illustration."

Now that the card's origin is clear, there remains one perhaps not-so-obvious question: What, precisely, *is* a "Liche"? We conveniently have, of course, the supposed picture of one right on the card, but let's take a look at where this word comes from (It's hard to find it in the dictionary; plus, you'll never find this "undead" meaning).

It's probably safe to say that this skeletal undead fiend made its first appearance in fantasy role-playing games like **Dungeons&Dragons®**, where it is usually portrayed as a former human (often with magical powers) who somehow manages to prolong his (or her) life even beyond death. It resembles a zombie or a vampire in some respects, and is usually a terrible opponent with devastating powers. Somehow one gets the impression that the **D&D** authors were looking for another scary sort of "living dead" to add to their bestiary, and just made up the name, written initially as "Lich", but also as "Liche" in various other roleplaying games thereafter.

Normally not found in non-dialectal modern English all on its own, the word does appear in compounds like *lich-gate* (also written as *lych-gate*) "a church-yard gate with a porch under which a bier may be rested", or *lich-house* "mortuary". It is therefore only natural to associate *lich* with death, graveyards and other unpleasant things. These compounds that incorporate *lich-* are relics from the time of Old English when there still was a word *lîc* (or *lîcaman*) meaning "body", pronounced like *leech* back then. Old English was spoken in England more than 1000 years ago, at which time the related languages English and German were still much closer to each other than they are today.

Taking a look at the other side of the English Channel, the ancient Old Saxon language probably comes close to being their common ancestor (Old Saxon also had a word *lîc*). The later Old High German term *lîhnamo* is closely related to *lîc*, *lîcaman* (and therefore, *lich*) and modern German *Leiche*, *Leichnam*, "corpse". Old High German *lîh* and Old English *lîc* originally meant almost exclusively "body" in a general sense, while *namo* meant "shell, husk, cover, wrap". A corpse (*lîhnamo*, literally "bodily shell") was apparently understood as the discarded shell that the soul left behind when it went on into the afterlife. At some later point, the meaning of *lîc* and its various descendants was narrowed down from referring to "body" in general to meaning only "dead body".

By the medieval times of Middle English, when there already were *lich* and a variant *liche* (pronounced in two syllables back then) around, they were understood as meaning "corpse" most of the time. Hence, like its lesser cousin Code Corpse, Liche is etymologically just that—a corpse. But one that seems pretty much alive and shambles around, throwing fireballs with abandon. So, Runners, beware!

Of course, if you insisted on going back to ancient times, *lich(e)* would just mean "body", but then, since *corpse* comes—via Old French—ultimately from the Latin *corpus* (also meaning "body"), old buddies Liche and Code Corpse would gang up once again on the poor Runner, etymologically speaking. But before you start asking about the etymology of the word *boring*, and to finally get away from this somewhat morbid, doom-and-gloomy discussion: A *lychee* is a kind of fruit grown in southeast Asia, not half as scary as a *lich(e)*, so please don't confuse the two. :-)

TRC Administrative Personnel

Chair:	Douglas Kaufman <Rabbismall@aol.com>
Program Director:	Argi Flack <argiflack@aol.com>
Administrative Director:	D. J. Barens <thedeej@geocities.com>
Membership Director:	Jason Erdmann <erdmann@facstaff.wisc.edu>
Newsletter Editor:	Jens Kreutzer <rb014004@mita.cc.keio.ac.jp>
Co-Editor:	Jennifer Clarke Wilkes <goblinsquee@yahoo.com>
Rules Sensei:	Holger Janssen <Holger.Janssen@bgt.de>
Secretary of Rankings:	Matthias Nagy <100642.3543@compuserve.com>
TRC Webmaster:	Scott Greig <scott@escape.ca>